

Drive to clear sanctuary of invasive plants

Nearly 3,000 sq km of the region, including 3 forest divisions in Wayanad, infested with alien plants

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The Forest and Wildlife Department will launch a special drive with the support of the public to curb the wild growth of invasive alien plants which are posing a threat to the flora and fauna in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS), a major habitat of Asiatic elephants in the country.

The spread of the exotic plants, including *Senna spectabilis*, *Maesopsis eminii*, *Mikania micrantha*, Lantana and Eupatorium, was posing a serious threat to the region.

Senna spectabilis is more dangerous than other exotic species owing to its fast growth.



Forest frontline staff uprooting *Senna spectabilis* seedlings in the Kakkapadam forest area under the Muthanga forest range of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

Nearly 3,000 sq km of the region, including three forest divisions in Wayanad contiguous with the Nagar-

hole National Park and the Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka and the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil

Nadu, is infested with the invasive plants.

Sanctuary officials have launched an eco-restoration drive in the Kakkapadam forest area under the Muthanga forest range of the sanctuary, sources said.

A group of frontline Forest Department staff have cleared more than two hectares of forestland.

"The Kerala Forest Research Institute has already initiated several control measures to eradicate matured senna trees and we effectively utilised it in the sanctuary," says V. Ajayaghosh, assistant warden.

About 3,000 to 5,000 seedlings sprout under every matured plant during monsoon and uprooting the plant

is the only way to eradicate it

"As a huge manpower is needed for the drive, we are planning to rope in the public, including NSS and NCC volunteers of various educational institutions, NGOs and members who attend nature study camps, N.T. Sajan, warden, told *The Hindu*.

"Every year the department organises more than 150 nature study camps at the Muthanga and Tholpetty ecotourism centres of the sanctuary and one day of each camp would be utilised for the drive, Mr. Sajan said.

The three-day camp is being organised for a group of 45 members and we hope that the drive would help address the issue to a certain extent," he added.